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*Child Development Special Section***Introduction to the Special Section of *Child Development on Positive Youth*****Development in Diverse and Global Contexts**

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Over the past thirty years, Positive Youth Development (PYD) has emerged as an important strand of applied developmental science. Conceptual work on PYD has focused on understanding attributes such as prosocial behavior, motivation, and agency (Damon, 2004; Larson, 2000; Lerner, this section; Pittman, 1991). A focus on positive development is especially important among marginalized or minority groups who are often neglected or disparaged, with little research attention directed towards understanding areas of strength among these youth, their families, and communities (Garcia Coll et al, 1986; McLoyd, 1990; 2006). Further, there is ample evidence of resilience and social engagement among young people surviving war, violence, and trauma, becoming voices of change not only in their own countries, but around the world (UNICEF, 2009; World Bank, 2010; Yousafzai, 2013). Yet, historically in the field, relatively less scholarly attention has focused on conceptualizing,

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The SRCD International committee is comprised of Jennifer Lansford (Co-Chair), Silvia Koller (Co-Chair), Colette Daiute, Anne Petersen (former Chair), Marilou Hyson, Suman Verma, Mary Gauvain, Frosso Motti, and Nan Zhou.

measuring, and understanding the development of a range of desirable attributes among young people (Cabrera et al., 2013; McLoyd, 1990, 2006). This Special Section seeks to redress this imbalance.

The Origins and Development of PYD

For many, PYD originated from ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) with a particular focus on the positive aspects of young people's relationships at the individual, family, community, and societal (civic) levels. However, while ecological systems theory may have provided a useful, broad conceptual framework for understanding how the psychological self is located in societal structures, the field's development owes much to earlier developmental research including work on attachment (e.g., Bowlby, 1953), socio-emotional development and learning (e.g., Bandura, 1977), and sociocultural approaches (e.g., Garcia Coll et al., 1986; Ogbu, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). These conceptualizations have sought to understand some important dimensions of development including processes of relational attachment, efficacy, adaptation and identity as well as an interest in how young people come to understand themselves as part of their neighborhoods and communities (Bandura, 1997, 2000; Erikson, 1980; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Quintana, 2008; Spencer et al., 2002).

PYD therefore emerged from a history of developmental science and harnessed a diverse set of approaches that shared a common interest in promoting positive adaptation. What many early PYD researchers also shared was a sense of dissatisfaction with what has been described as "the deficit model" of human development (Damon, 2004). Arguably a core characteristic of PYD research remains an explicit rejection of an exclusive focus on addressing what is wrong or deficient in behaviour to emphasize, instead, how young people's skills and abilities can be nurtured and improved. For instance, the developmental assets approach (Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartian, Sesma & Dulmen, 2006) has chartered how

characteristics such as positive relationships, opportunities, skills, values, and self-perceptions of children in seventh to ninth grade are associated with academic success three years later. Interventions that focus on building developmental assets therefore have the potential to promote positive social and educational outcomes.

Another notable strand of research, both in the U.S. and around the globe, has focused on resilience. PYD and resilience science may differ - for instance, resilience frameworks typically take a broad view incorporating concepts of risk and protection into work on adjustment and adaptation. Typically, studies of resilience require the presence of risk, whereas PYD approaches often address the emergence of positive attributes in young people regardless of whether risk exists, helping to examine when these desirable aspects of character develop with attention to the more specific contexts (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). However, there is much in common between the two approaches (see Masten, 2014).

Though it is difficult to pinpoint who initially coined the phrase “positive youth development,” a number of scholars contributed to its origins. Karen Pittman, sociologist and youth development leader, who offers her commentary in this Special Section, is recognized for acknowledging that youth who are “problem-free are not necessarily fully prepared.” This phrase highlights the fact that the lack of involvement in substance use and delinquency does not mean that youth are ready to be contributing members of society (Pittman, 1991; Pittman & Wright, 1991). Correspondingly, the decade of 1990’s signalled funded approaches to prevention science focused on preventing problem behaviour with an eye towards common factors that might reduce problems and promote desirable characteristics including social connectedness, socio-emotional skills, efficacy and identity (Catalano et al., 1999; 2002). Some scholars have been quick to remind us that we should not only attend to the roles of adults and youth contexts, but focus upon the youth themselves who are not only “pulled but

could propel” their development by genuine initiative and agency (Larson, 2000, p. 172); areas still worthy of further conceptual and empirical attention in the study of PYD.

Over the past decade and a half, some of the earliest, most enduring, and productive work with a key youth-organization, 4-H has advanced the field with conceptual, measurement, and longitudinal models of PYD examining the impact of various developmental contexts (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). Thus, this work by Lerner and colleagues, also a commentator in this Special Section, extends the theoretical and methodological development of PYD, examining the role of contextual influences and factors upon youth outcomes.

Overview of the Special Section

This Special Section includes discussion of historical and contemporary research and also commentaries which offer a fuller analysis of the origins and history of the approach. Taken together, the manuscripts offer a state-of-the-art snapshot of research into PYD. Our manuscripts, from researchers on five continents, cover topics from the benefits of afterschool contexts in the USA and the influence of school climate on positive development in Colombian youth, to the development of Zulu youth in South African townships, and the effects of economic recession on youth resilience in Greece. The studies employ a range of methods, as befits the topic. These include experimental and ethnographic approaches, along with large-scale surveys using cross-sectional and longitudinal measures.

The work reported in the special section incorporates common conceptual and methodological themes, many of which are shared by previous research in the area. For instance, PYD studies have an avowedly ecological emphasis that grounds understanding of developmental processes in overlapping contexts of individual, family, schools, community, and societal domains of activity. In this respect, what often characterises PYD work is a focus, sometimes implicit, on young people's sense of self and the acquisitions of adaptive

competencies, and how they intersect with membership in family, peer, community and social groups (see again Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Indeed, the ways in which these context-bound identities and competencies develop is of fundamental importance in any context where psychological and other outcomes are entwined with social action and engagement (Eichas, Meca, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2015).

The importance of social identities is very visible in this special section and explicitly addressed in the study by Eichas, Montgomery, Meca, and Kurtines (this section) where marginalized adolescents' self-transformation - focused on a model of youth agency, aspiration, and advancement - is studied in an alternative school context. However, several studies in the Special Section consider identity as it is embedded in diverse contexts globally, from immigrant youth in Greece (Motti-Stefani, this section) to migrant youth in KwaZulu-Natal (Schwartz, Theron, & Scales, this section) and among youth and families in Turkey (Laible, Kumru, Gustavo, Streit, Yagmurlu, & Sayil; this section)

Social identities become active when they are embedded in social and cultural contexts. A further theme hitherto deserving more attention in the PYD literature (e.g., Ungar, 2011), and a clear strand in several studies in this Special Section is an appreciation of the role of culture and context in shaping development. Such contexts are multifarious, and it may be a mistaken endeavour to seek to find ways in which diverse social contexts possess a common set of characteristics to explain developmental processes. The effectiveness with which individuals and intervention projects adapt to their context is an important consideration for those working on PYD (see Lerner and Pittman, this section).

For instance, Jagers, Lozada, Rivas-Drake, and Guillaume (this section) explore the Developmental Designs approach (when it was implemented in an equitable school) and civic engagement with 515 Black and Latino middle school students. When school climates are equitable – educators highlighting students' sense of race, gender and class equity - and

combined with democratic homeroom advisory, classroom practices, there were enhanced civic attitudes after one year, identifying novel processes for minority youth related to their positive development. The related issue of diversity is addressed in Smith, Witherspoon, and Osgood's (this section) study of community-based youth-serving organizations where quality programming and supportive environments are critical to youth development and particularly salient to cultural values of respect for minority youth.

The international dimension of PYD is a further distinctive and timely characteristic theme to emerge from this Special Section. Again, this theme draws into focus the ways in which culture and context can influence the nature and implementation of interventions, their success, and the theories and challenges presented in developing effective tools and programs for PYD. For example, Kanacri, Eisenberg, Thartori, Pastorelli, Gerbino, and Caprara (this section) examine PYD and the importance of school climate in promoting prosocial behaviors and student positivity among a sample of Colombian pre-adolescents. Koller and Verma's (this section) commentary highlights lessons to be learned and challenges in work conducted in different cultural contexts.

How context is conceptualised and, to some extent, operationalised, is rarely fixed or universal in research; a striking feature of the present special section is the range of methodological approaches and measures in the different research contexts. For instance, experimental paradigms can still inform much work in the field and the understanding conceptual basis of interventions. Thomaes, Sedikides, van den Bos, Hutteman, and Reijntes (this section) focused upon resources within a sample of adolescents in the U.S., using daily diary methodology, who choose to live authentic, satisfied lives, using novel conceptualizations and measurement approaches to demonstrate how *authenticity* (a sense of "oneself") links with emotional well-being and is a core driver of positive youth development. Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (this section) utilized a meta-analytic

approach to 82 studies of socio-emotional interventions from kindergarten to high school which highlights that positive outcomes extend beyond educational benefits to broader developmental outcomes including graduation and safe sexual behaviors. Topples et al., (this section) use advanced methodological techniques to identify various typologies of adjustment among maltreated youth including more maladaptive and stress resistant classes of youth). Additionally, included in the range of methods employed across studies in this Special Section are several longitudinal studies (Labile et al., this section; Kanacri et al., this section; Motti-Stefani; this section; Topples et al., this section).

However, while the specifics of contexts vary, establishing links between contexts and the outcomes of PYD initiatives is vital if we are to raise the profile of work in this area above the status of an advocacy science which is often wrongly perceived to lack the scientific rigour and objectivity of other areas of developmental psychology. As many of our authors and commentators in this special section note, what is required is social and developmental meta-theory that can provide a frame for understanding change and assessing the impact of interventions as they are adapted to different cultural contexts (Wuermli, Tubbs, Petersen, & Aber, 2015). This work has started, but requires an ongoing conversation between PYD researchers and researchers across psychology and allied areas.

In any such conversation it is important to appreciate the positive contribution that PYD researchers have made and can continue to make across developmental science. This contribution extends beyond the formation of a new area of inquiry and the articulation of a more balanced approach to understanding positive as well as negative aspects of development. PYD research has also led the way in innovating new methods of measurement, assessment, and research methodology. This innovation has stemmed partly from pragmatic research needs; researchers in the area are typically engaging with young people experiencing difficult circumstances or in difficult situations and in such instances experimentation,

complex assessments, or even less complex interview and survey techniques can be challenging to carry out. Partly, too, there is also a sense in which research requires sensitivity to individuals and meaningful, nuanced analysis of the personal perspectives and testimonies of research participants. Thus, qualitative methods are frequently married with quantitative or experimental approaches. This mixed methods approach enriches the field and allows for positive change to be advocated more persuasively.

Additionally, the moral dimension of PYD is a distinctive characteristic. This focus on promoting positive outcomes from a moral perspective is evident across studies in this special issue and drives much theoretical and applied work in the field. One may argue whether there is moral equivalence between the promotion of positive or prosocial behaviours and addressing negative, antisocial, or morally deficient ones. Regardless, it can be in no doubt that by advancing positive outcomes PYD researchers and practitioners pursue a set of moral goals that seek particular outcomes in the young people, communities, and societies with which they engage. That this work is motivated by a positive moral purpose does not imply a diminished scientific rigor and importance. Rather, PYD takes seriously and addresses directly the responsibility of science and scientists to apply knowledge in a practical and efficacious way. The research reported in this special section makes such a contribution and is scientifically all the more worthy for it.

As Pittman (this issue) notes in her commentary, this collection of papers is not only timely but also critical: together they add a system and structure to an often disparate field of studies and initiatives in PYD. As such, Moore calls upon this Special Section to advance and inform interventions (Moore, this section) through an expert focus on core scientific ideas and evidence that can translate into practice.

PYD in the future

Taken together, the papers in this special section stand as evidence for the social contribution, intellectual rigour, and a propitious future for PYD research. The different research approaches and range of measures help researchers to understand both the generalities and the contextually driven specifics of developmental change. They employ both traditional and more innovative assessments of PYD and its fostering characteristics. If there is diversity in methodologies there is also diversity in the contexts in which development happens and the factors that are likely to promote development in different situations. These papers suggest both previously explored and new conceptual directions that incorporate not only youth responses but also their identity and culture, and they emerge in various settings. In this respect, while presenting and promoting a positive view of development for children and adolescents, what these studies show is that high quality science can improve the effectiveness of interventions. Nevertheless, there is, without doubt, a need for still closer relationships among theoreticians, policymakers, and practitioners not only to establish a common set of concepts, theories, and language, but also to identify existing and new areas where PYD interventions can make a positive impact.

Researchers also need to construct reliable measures of change using a range of methodologies and collect robust empirical data regarding the validity of these measures and their usefulness in identifying developmental change in diverse contexts. The field would also benefit greatly from more longer-term, longitudinal studies that can capture and establish how enduring and pervasive positive change happens. Additionally, much previous work has focused on positive change in adolescence but there is opportunity to explore how PYD approaches can reap benefits among younger children and also, potentially, across the lifespan. Longitudinal studies can be costly, and time-consuming, but several of the authors point out effecting lasting positive change has tremendous benefits for individual, societal, moral, and economic advancement. Investment into research in PYD could reap rich rewards

by promoting social cohesion, civic engagement, positive attitudes, and reducing a sense in which social action should be addressed only when dealing with deficits.

The field of PYD, as many of our authors and commentators note, has made impressive progress since its emergence some 20 years ago. A burgeoning number of studies has added both to our understanding of processes, the scope of change, and developmental benefits that intervention studies can make on young people's lives. This progress extends internationally and the broadening of the cultural scope of PYD has added rich, new perspectives from diverse social contexts. A challenge, with this broader perspective, is to achieve a consolidation and integration of approaches to produce a shared common understanding of the core developmental mechanisms that drive productive change.

Moreover, although the field has moved on considerably from its early days as a striking alternative to the deficit model of development, the presence of the deficit model is often still felt in many research areas. This presence is felt both conceptually and in the sorts of measures that researchers use to track change. Partly, this may be explained by the need for any new research field to locate its innovation within a framework of existing knowledge and literature, which is dominated by a deficit paradigm. There is, however, a pressing need to develop new measures and new theories to optimise the ways in which research can inform interventions. It may be that these new measures pick out new or previously understudied areas of developmental growth to vitalise research into broader aspects of human growth, learning and change. This is both the challenge and the promise for the future of PYD.

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